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ABSTRACT

A study examined the barriers encountered by returning adult students and the potential change of those barriers over time. The 43 students constituting the survey population were enrolled in the graduate programs of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Students had to be at least 25 years old and have been out of school for at least 3 years to be considered a returning student. The students were interviewed twice, once in the first semester of their return to school and again a year later. The major barriers perceived by the returning adult students were increase in stress, parking in and around campus, balancing family and school time, balancing job and school time, and spending time with immediate family. The problem of balancing family and school time became more severe over the year; however, the severity of the other barriers remained the same. The barriers related to difficulties in obtaining campus information, following registration procedures, and obtaining information from the graduate school decreased over time. Other than an increase in severity of stress, there were no changes in psychosocial barriers over time. As expected, situational barriers were perceived as the most serious and did not abate over time. Because only 3 of the 43 persons in the study withdrew from school after the second interview, the relationship between perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal could not be tested. (MN)

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College of Agricultural & Life Sciences
Research Report

Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students

Daniele Flannery and Jerold Apps

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PREFACE

For the past fifteen years large numbers of adults have been returning to colleges and universities to continue their education. Projections by The National Center for Educational Statistics (1982) indicate this trend will continue. For the most part these students are 25 years of age and older, have been out of school for some time, and have various worker and family roles. Most have returned to school for job-related reasons (Apps, 1981; Astin, 1976; Scott, 1979).

Although the increase in returning adult students has been well-documented, research into barriers met by returning students and changes in those barriers over time has been fragmented. In addition, research into the relationship between perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal has been non-existent. Therefore, the objectives of this research were threefold: 1) to determine the major barriers perceived by adults who return to school, 2) to study change in the perception of major barriers over time, and 3) to test for a relationship between perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal.

What research has been done has focused on motivational models of explaining human behavior, and has emphasized internal forces as the primary factors in overcoming barriers. Descriptive literature, however, suggests the importance of circumstances external to the individual. Hence the model proposed in this research was that the circumstances of adult returning students' lives (e.g. roles of worker, parent, etc., or everyday situations such as transportation issues) are related to the barriers they perceive and to their persistence or withdrawal.

The more clearly the returning adult student can be described, the better the potential for complex model building in the effort to understand the adult returning student. The authors hope that this monograph makes some small contribution to new ways of perceiving adult returning students for future research, for planning by administrators, teachers and students themselves.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students is the report of a study of the barriers met by returning adult students and potential change of those barriers over time. The students were enrolled in the graduate programs of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. These adults were "returning" because they had been out of school for at least three years. Forty-three returning students (25 years of age and older) were interviewed twice, once (Time 1) in the first semester of their return to school, and again (Time 2) one year later. The purpose of the interviews was to identify the barriers the students perceived when returning, change in the barriers over time, and their biographical and demographical characteristics.

Findings

The survey instrument, Barriers to Learning (Schmidt, 1980), was constructed from the literature review and included barriers which could be classified as institutional, situational or psychosocial.

1. The major barriers perceived by the adults who had returned to school were a) increase in stress, b) parking in and around campus, c) balancing family and school time, d) balancing job and school time, and e) spending time with immediate family.

2. Balancing family and school time changed significantly between Time 1 and Time 2 with the barrier becoming a more severe problem than in Time 1. The other major barriers remained the same.

3. Three of the major barriers were related to the adult roles of spouse, parent and worker.

4. Further analysis of these role-related barriers corroborated some findings in the role literature: Significantly more women than men rated balancing family and school time as "very serious"; however, no significant difference between women and men was found when all the family-related barriers were combined. While not significant, more employed men perceived serious problems balancing job and school time than employed women did; spending time with immediate family was a more serious problem in marriages where there were children present.

5. Barriers related to difficulty in obtaining campus information decreased significantly in severity between Time 1 and Time 2. While not significant, institutional barriers of registration procedures and obtaining information from the graduate school decreased over time.

6. Situational barriers which were skill-related, i.e., problems with reading skills and study skills, decreased significantly over time.

7. Other than the increase in severity of stress, there were no changes in psychosocial barriers over time.

8. As expected, situational barriers, three of the major barriers at both Time 1 and Time 2, were perceived as the most serious of barriers and the intensity of these barriers did not abate over time. In fact, it increased significantly for balancing family and school time. Further, these three situational barriers did reflect the adult roles of returning students, those of spouse, parent and worker.

9. Because only 3 of the 43 persons in the study withdrew from school after the second interview, a relationship between the perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal could not be tested. (See APPENDIXES B and C for persistence/withdrawal data on 47 other persons who were interviewed once.) It is to be noted that the reasons given by the three who withdrew were role related. Two cited the birth of a child and one gave getting married as the reason for withdrawing.

10. This monograph raised the issue of the relationship of numbers of roles to perceived barriers. Students with more roles experienced significantly more difficulty with balancing job and school time and with spending time with immediate family than did students with fewer roles. However, with only 3 persons out of 43 in this study dropping out, it must be acknowledged that occupying multiple roles did not seem to be a hindrance to persistence for this group of returning adult students.

Detailed discussion of the study findings begins on p. 7 this monograph. Considerations for practice and for the future begin on p. 21.

Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students

Daniele Flannery and Jerold Apps

For more than 15 years a surprisingly large number of adults have enrolled in college and university programs. The National Center of Educational Statistics (1982) noted a 2.1 million increase in higher education enrollment by students 25 years of age and older between 1970 and 1980. Projections for the next decade indicate that the number of older students will increase by another 1.1 million representing for 47 percent of all students enrolled in higher education. For the most part, these persons are older than the traditional participants (see APPENDIX A for a brief discussion of returning and traditional students), have been out of school for some time, have various worker and family roles and have returned to school for job-related reasons (Apps, 1981; Astin, 1976; Scott, 1976).

Although the increasing numbers of returning adult students have been well-documented, and studies about returning students (particularly women) have been abundant (see Scott, 1979; Tittle & Denker, 1979, 1977; Wells, 1974 for literature reviews), research into barriers met by returning students and changes in those barriers over time has been fragmented, and research into the relationship between barriers and persistence/withdrawal has been non-existent.

This monograph is based on research which examined the barriers experienced by persons 25 years and older returning to graduate school after at least three years out of school. Specifically, this research approached three focal questions:

1. What were the major barriers perceived by adults who had returned to school?
2. Did the barriers which returning adult students experienced when they return to school change over time?
3. Was there any relationship between the barriers students experienced and persistence or withdrawal?

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions were used in this study:

Returning older student: Persons 25 years and older who have been out of college at least three years and have returned to graduate school either full or part-time.

Barriers to learning: Major problems faced by older students after they have returned to school.

Institutional barriers: Practices and procedures of learning institutions and agencies which may exclude or discourage the adult learner (e.g., inconvenient schedules, or locations, full-time fees for part-time study, inappropriate courses of study or difficulty in obtaining necessary campus registration or graduate information).

Situational barriers: Barriers arising from one's situation in life at a given time (e.g., lack of time due to job and home responsibility, lack of money, lack of child care, transportation problems).

Psychosocial barriers: "Psychological" refers to internal factors such as one's attitudes, beliefs and values, one's sense of self-esteem; "sociological" refers to the external levels of socioeconomic status, social forces such as the opinions of others, and past experience in the school setting.

Employment status: Full-time employment is 36 to 40 work hours per week; part-time employment is less than 36 work hours per week (most often 10-20 hours a week).

Education status: Full-time student status is 9 to 12 credit hours per semester; part-time student status is 8 or less credit hours per semester (usually 3-6 credits).

Persistence: Connotes that one is in the process of achieving, or has achieved, the degree sought by returning to school.

Withdrawal: Connotes that one has ceased to pursue the degree sought by returning to school. Persons who withdraw may be referred to as having "stopped out," meaning they left school with the intention of returning at some later date, or as having "dropped out," meaning they left school with the intention of not returning.

THEORETICAL SETTING AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two literature traditions have contributed to the research questions of this monograph: barrier literature and persistence/withdrawal literature. Contributions to the barrier literature have been made from three perspectives: participation research on potential students, literature on adults who have returned to school, and a particularly voluminous research area on returning women students. The areas which have contributed most to the persistence/withdrawal literature have been studies of adult education classes such as adult literacy studies, non-credit offerings and adult evening classes; studies of college attrition (undergraduate and graduate); and studies of adult students returning to higher education.

While theory in adult education is slight (Cross, 1982; Dickenson and Rusnell, 1971; Mezirow, 1971), there has been some theory-testing and attempt to build theory with regard to barriers and to persistence/withdrawal of adult learners. Most of these attempts have been influenced by the field of psychology. Explaining human behavior as the interaction between an individual and the environment, theorists have posited various strengths of relationship between the individual and the environment. Most imply that the stronger the individual's motivation, the more likely the individual would be to overcome the environmental barriers. Rubenson (1977), Cross (1982) and

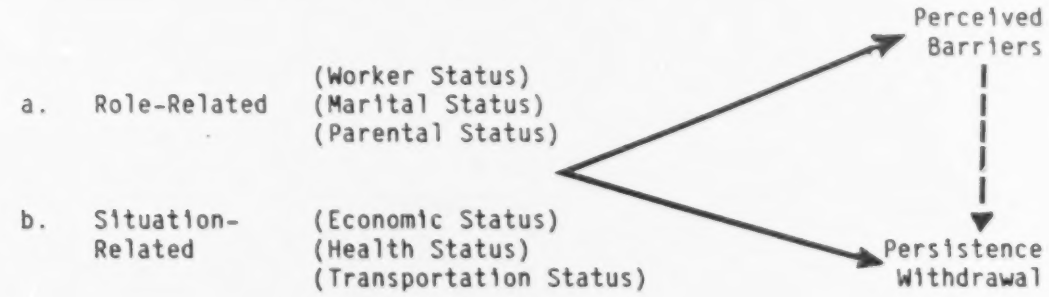
Tinto (1978) have included this theoretical stance in their models of why people participate, persist or withdraw from learning activities. The assumption underlying this position is that if one wants something badly enough, one can attain it regardless of the barriers met.

This emphasis on the relationship between motivation and achievement can be questioned. It is true that attempts to measure motivational level in terms of students' own expectations about their chances of dropping out have demonstrated that students with moderately low expectations of success are most likely to drop out. But for the most part, motivational factors have not been established as related to attrition (Pantages & Creedon, 1978, p. 71). Also, literature on returning students from both the barrier and persistence/withdrawal perspectives has raised some questions about these assumptions. Adult returning students, rather than citing motivational reasons, cite lack of time, cost, home and job responsibilities, classroom settings, psychological reasons and illness as reasons for not participating, as barriers once they have returned to school (Apps, 1979; Astin, 1976; Cross & Zusman, 1979; Illinois, 1980), and as reasons for dropping out (Feldman, 1973; Long, 1983;).

Unlike the motivational models which suggest internal forces are the primary factors in persistence/withdrawal, the adult returning student literature suggests the importance of circumstances external to the individual. The research reported in this document was an attempt to consider those circumstances.

The model proposed in this research was that the circumstances of adult returning students' lives are related to the barriers they perceive and to their persistence or withdrawal. These circumstances may be role-related, that is, arise from the adult roles (worker, marital or parent status) or be related to everyday situations such as transportation difficulties, economics, health, etc.

Circumstances of adult returning students' lives



It was not the intention of this research to suggest that the circumstances of adult returning students' lives are the only factors related to perceived barriers or to persistence/withdrawal. Measures of self-esteem, expectations of academic success, and actual grades were utilized to control for two prevalent dimensions of motivational models. However, the purpose of this research was to investigate the facet of circumstances of adult returning students' lives. Therefore, the model tested was intentionally simple. Based

on the results of this and other research, circumstances of adults' lives, if so warranted, can later be entered into a complex causal model.

This research addressed the following questions:

1. What were the major barriers perceived by adults who had returned to school?
2. Were the circumstances of the returning adult students' lives (eg. worker, parent or marital status) related to the barriers?
3. Did those barriers change over time?
4. Was there a relationship between perceived barriers and persistence or withdrawal?

Research expectations derived from the barrier and persistence/withdrawal literature were as follows:

1. Situational barriers would be more serious than psychosocial or institutional barriers.
2. Women would cite more family-related barriers; men more job or institution-related barriers.
3. Institutional barriers would lessen in severity over time.
4. If, as descriptive studies indicated, barriers experienced while a student and reasons given for dropping out were basically the same and were primarily situational, then
   a. the situational barriers could be expected to either stay the same or increase in severity over time, and
   b. situational barriers would be related to persistence/withdrawal with those persons who withdrew perceiving the most difficulty with situational barriers.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

STUDY SAMPLE

A stratified random sample of 91 persons was selected from newly enrolled University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate students in the School of Education and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS). The sample was generated over a five semester period beginning with the Spring term of 1981 and ending with the Spring term of 1983. Those included had the following characteristics: 1) 25 years of age and older, 2) U.S. citizens, and 3) three years between current and previous enrollments.

DATA COLLECTION

The 91 participants were contacted by telephone between the sixth and twelfth week of their first semester on campus and interview sessions were arranged. Data were collected on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus in a one-to-one setting, using three questionnaires and a set of 15 open-ended interview questions. Questionnaires included a biographical assessment, a 25-item perceived Barriers to Learning instrument (Schmidt, 1980) and Rosenberg's "Self- Esteem Scale" (Rosenberg, 1965). The instruments were presented in the sequence above, followed by a tape-recorded, open-ended question interview session.

The same data were collected one year later from those remaining in school in the subjects' third continuous semester of enrollment. The same procedures were followed in order to generate comparable data. Forty-three of the original 91 persons were measured the second time. (See APPENDIX B for information on the 47 persons not measured a second time.)

Institutional records provided data on those who had achieved a degree, on those who continued to take classes, on those who had ceased to enroll and on grades received.

Persons who had ceased to enroll without achieving a degree during the four years were contacted by telephone in March of 1985. All but one was found; the missing subject was dropped from the study. A telephone interview, based on a previously prepared questionnaire was conducted to determine a) whether the persons had "stopped out" (i.e., intended to return at some time) or had "dropped out" (i.e., did not intend to return to school at all), b) the reasons for the discontinuing, and c) whether any demographic variables (e.g., marital status) had changed between the time of the first interview and the time of ceasing to enroll. Because of the concern of this study with change of barriers over time it was important to focus on the 43 persons who were available for both Time 1 and Time 2 data collections.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The 25-item perceived Barriers to Learning instrument was created by a colleague (Schmidt, 1980) for use in the "Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students" study in order to examine the degree of problems returning adults were experiencing. The instrument was constructed from an initial pool of 35 items according to methods prescribed by Fox (1969). The pool of items was drawn from previous work by Apps (1981) Carp, Peterson and Roelfs (1974), Cross (1979, 1982), Darkenwald and Merriam (1982), Sewall (1982), and represented three categories of barriers: institutional, situational and psychosocial. Each item constituted a barrier variable. Institutional barriers were concerned with library access, parking and registration problems as well as obtaining campus information. Situational and psychosocial barriers included statements about balancing job and school time, problems with study skills, acceptance by spouse and children for the return to school, increased stress, etc.

The instrument's content and face validity were determined using a panel of experts who were experienced in instrument design and who had professional experience with returning adult students. Initial instrument reliability from the pilot study was $r = .85$ and a reliability estimate using the 91 persons of the study resulted in $r = .84$.

A one-page questionnaire was developed by Flannery to obtain information about those who withdrew. The objectives were threefold: 1) to determine whether persons had stopped out or dropped out, 2) to ascertain why the persons had withdrawn, and 3) to determine if demographic variables had changed between the first interview and the time the person(s) withdrew.

Reasons for withdrawing (stopping out and dropping out) and persistence were taken first from the literature (Anderson and Darkenwald, 1979; Berkove, 1978; Feldman, 1974; Knox and Sjorgren, 1966; Long, 1983; Pantages and Creedon, 1975; Verner and Davis, 1964), and secondly from the Barriers to Learning instrument.

Questions related to changes in demographic data were included in order to ascertain changes in major adult roles. Content and face validity were determined using a panel of experts who had professional experience with returning adult students. The form of the instrument was further refined with help from the Wisconsin Survey Research Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The instrument was piloted with seven returning adult students who had not completed the programs which they had begun.

STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for statistical computations. Statistical analyses consisted primarily of Chi-square, T-test of means, T-test of proportions, Paired T-tests, and McNemar test for change over time, using .05 as the acceptable significance level.

FINDINGS

ADULT RETURNING STUDENTS - GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The sample consisted of 19 males and 24 females, with a median age of 30.0 years and a range of 25 to 61 years. Seventeen students were enrolled in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) (8 women and 9 men) and 26 in the School of Education (16 women and 10 men) . Seventy-seven percent (33) of the respondents were married, 21 percent (9) were never married and one was separated. Forty-four percent (19) were parents. Twenty-eight percent (12) of the participants were employed full-time, 49 percent (21) part-time and 23 percent (10) were unemployed.

Forty-four percent (19) of the respondents started their graduate programs with a Bachelor's degree, while 40 percent (17) had some Master's degree credits and 16 percent (7) had earned an M.S. degree or more. The median length of time out of school was 6.8 years; 56 percent (24) had been out of school three to five years, 16 percent (7) were out six to eight years and 28 percent (12) were returning after nine or more years away. The 25-29 year old category averaged least years out of school and more had the Bachelor's degree. Eighty-four percent (36) of the respondents said that they had returned to school for a career-related reason -- 61 percent of those for new job skills, and 33 percent to improve current job skills. Five percent (2) returned to "broaden their professional capabilities." The remaining 11 percent (7) said they had returned for intellectual growth or simply because it was convenient (spouse had received a job in the area, etc.). Fifty-eight percent (25) of the participants were attending school full-time taking nine or more semester credits. Forty-two percent (18) were part-time students. Those with fewer years out of school were more likely to be full-time students.

The second data collection took place one year later during the students' third semester in school. Sign tests for changes on each demographic variable between Time 1 and Time 2 showed no significant differences had taken place. Over the course of the year, one married person had been divorced and three non-parents had become parents. While eleven persons (26 percent) actually changed job status, total percentages for job status categories at Time 2 (26 percent (11) full-time, 56 percent (24) part-time, and 19 percent (8) unemployed) were not significantly different from Time 1. Twenty-three percent (10) changed student status between Time 1 and Time 2. Total

percentages for the student status category at Time 1 were 58 percent (25) full-time and 42 percent (18) part-time, and at Time 2 there were 53 percent (23) full-time and 47 percent (20) part-time students. There were no significant differences.

PERSISTENCE/WITHDRAWAL-GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

By March 1985, when the data collection was completed, the degree status for the 43 students was as follows: 93 percent had persisted, 7 percent had withdrawn. Because of the likelihood that adult students may not finish a degree in four or five years, and because adult students who withdraw do not necessarily intend the withdrawal to be permanent, a further breakdown of degree status is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEGREE STATUS

Status	Number	%
Obtained a degree	22	51
Continuing students	18	42
Stopped out	2	5
Dropped out	1	2

Of the two persons who stopped out, one was male, age 28, married with one child under five years of age, a part-time student in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences; the other was female, a part-time student in the School of Education, age 28, married, with one child under five years of age. Both were employed full-time and both gave the birth of a new child (twins for the male) as the only reason for stopping out.

The person who dropped out was female, age 30, was married at the time of the first interview and separated at the time of the second interview, had no children, was employed full-time and was a part-time student in the School of Education. Getting married was the only reason she gave for dropping out.

MAJOR BARRIERS FACED BY OLDER STUDENTS ON RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Top Five Barriers

Time 1: When viewing the perceived barriers across all categories, the following were the five most serious barriers for returning students in the first semester of enrollment: (Table 2)

1. increase in stress
2. parking in and around campus
3. balancing family and school time
4. balancing job and school time
5. spending time with immediate family

TABLE 2
TOP FIVE BARRIERS: TIME 1

Situation	Degree of Perceived Problem		
	No Problem	Somewhat	Serious/Very Serious
Stress	10%	57%	33%
Parking	44%	25%	31%
Family Time	32%	38%	30%
Job Time	24%	47%	29%
Immediate Family Time	31%	50%	19%

Ninety percent of the returning adult students noted "increase in stress" as a barrier to their learning, and one-third perceived the increase in stress as a serious or very serious barrier. No significant differences within demographic variables were found with regard to stress.

Stress was a most serious barrier for women who were in the School of Education; most of these women were mostly married and parents.

Evidence from interviews with respondents emphasized the issues of balancing roles and time. One explained, "I won't have time till the end of the semester. I'm not sure I can get everything all done, I'm not sure I will meet my responsibilities to the people and at work and to myself for school and to my husband...I am trying to do too much; I really don't know where or if I could eliminate anything. There's nothing I could eliminate. I couldn't drop a course because the department wouldn't let me. I couldn't cut my hours back at work. They are already cut back so far and I have to work to make some money. What really slid was home. I didn't do any cooking and I didn't go do any cleaning...you just keep going...it's like that train in the movie that just slides through to no end. You just slide right up to the end of the semester and you better hope that when you hit the last day or the last exam you can walk away."

"The stresses of school are different than the stresses I felt in my job," another wrote. "Tests and examinations are stress. I wasn't evaluated like that in my job. I felt like I could go to work and leave it there, come home and not worry about it and do something else. In school I bring it home with me. I have all these stresses on my mind much more constantly."

An outcome of stress, change in health, is very evident in student responses. The content analysis of the interview data showed that 45 percent of the respondents noted they were less healthy than when they started school. Respondents commented: When I started back to school I experienced a lot of health problems. Apparently it was a shock to my system. I went through a real traumatic time, I was on medication and I got infections that I

couldn't get rid of, etc. The doctor suggested it was due to stress and suggested I take two weeks and go away. He told me 'the only way that you're gonna beat it is if you go away.' I said, 'but I can't, you know how you go through that routine, I got a job, family, etc...'"

"My health changed after I returned to school, I was real tired and I couldn't sleep. I couldn't go to sleep especially every Sunday night. I would lay in bed and think about work and school and how I was going to fit it all in and I would make a long list of everything I had to do for the week and schedule my monthly calendar. I would still feel rushed on Sunday night and worry, even if I didn't have anything to do on Monday. It was the beginning of the week and I'd be real worried about what was going to happen during the week."

The second most serious barrier, difficulty finding parking in and around campus, was subjected to chi-square analysis to test for differences among the demographic variables. Full-time employed and unemployed persons had significantly more serious problems with parking than did persons who were employed part-time (X^2 = 11.19, 4df, $p < .05$). The parking barrier may be an artifact of the Madison campus where parking has been a difficult problem for faculty, students and staff for years. The parking barrier may also be related to the fact that persons in the School of Education are more likely to have evening classes, when parking near buildings where classes are held is more desirable yet not easily attainable.

The interview narratives also mentioned other parking issues, including the limited number of meters available on campus, the difficulty of finding a meter during the day, the need to park outside the campus area and walk in, and the possibility of getting tickets if meters were not plugged every two hours. One respondent began by noting, "I shouldn't be interviewing today -- I just got two parking tickets in an hour!"

Parking problems were mentioned most frequently by women, primarily in the context of safety issues. "I'm conscious of the fact that there are problems," said one, "but I go where it's well lighted, I walk quickly..."

Balancing family and school time was the third most serious barrier for returning students. Several significant differences were found with regard to this barrier. Both men and women had problems with balancing school and family time, but significantly more women than men rated this problem as very serious (X^2 = 13.52, 2df, $p < .05$). People with children had very serious problems balancing family and school time" (X^2 = 7.41, 2df, $p < .05$). Part- and full-time students were almost identical in their perceptions about this variable.

Balancing job and school time was the fourth of the most serious barriers. Chi-square analysis revealed no significant differences at the .05 level. Of those who were employed, more men perceived serious problems (44 percent) with this variable than women did (17 percent). Of this group all were married and were parents. Full- and part-time employed persons as well as full- and part-time students were very similar in their perceptions of this variable.

The fifth of the most serious barriers at Time 1 was spending time with immediate family. The difference between this and the third barrier

(balancing family and school time) is that this barrier refers to one specific task within balancing family and school time, that of actually spending time with the family. One significant difference with an obvious explanation was found with regard to this variable: Persons with children perceived this as a more serious problem than persons who did not have children did (X^2 = 5.97, 2df, $p < .5$). Again, as with the balancing family-time variable, the minimum expected cell frequency for marital status was too small to employ chi-square analysis, yet 73 percent of the married persons had problems with this variable, 23 percent, serious problems. All three categories of employment and full- and part-time students were similar in their perceptions of the variable as problematic or not.

Time 2: The same 43 returning students were interviewed one year later. These persons were in their third semester at school.

The five major barriers perceived by the returning adults in their first semester of school remained the top five barriers in the third semester. The McNemar test for change demonstrated that of the top five barriers, only balancing family and school time changed significantly over time. Students had significantly more problems balancing family and school time ($p < .05$) at Time 2 than they had had in Time 1.

TABLE 3
TOP FIVE BARRIERS: TIME 1 and TIME 2

	Degree of Perceived Problem					
	No Problem		Somewhat		Serious/Very Serious	
Situation	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
Stress	10%	5%	57%	60%	33%	35%
Parking	44%	28%	25%	23%	31%	49%
Family Time	32%	10%	38%	58%	30%	32%
Job Time	24%	26%	47%	32%	29%	42%
Immediate Family Time	31%	22%	50%	51%	19%	27%

As can be noted in Table 3 in the comparison of major barriers between Time 1 and Time 2, in addition to the significant increase in the difficulty balancing family and school time, perception of each of the other variables as a barrier increased in severity between Time 1 and Time 2.

Institutional and Informational Barriers

Institutional barriers are those practices and procedures of learning institutions or agencies which may exclude or discourage the adult learner. Examples of institutional barriers are inconvenient schedules or locations, inappropriate courses of study, grade or test score prerequisites.

Informational barriers may connote the participant's failure to seek information and the institution's failure to provide relevant information on educational opportunities.

Time 1: Returning adult students during their first semester of classes noted a number of specific institutional problems.

Forty-five percent or more cited problems with registration procedures, obtaining financial aid, teaching approaches used by instructors, and parking on and around campus.

Of the institutional barriers the three perceived as most serious are indicated in Table 4. The parking issue has already been addressed under the section on the five major barriers.

TABLE 4
PREDOMINANT INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

Situation	Degree of Perceived Problem		
	No Problem	Somewhat	Serious-Very Serious
Parking	44%	25%	31%
Obtaining financial aid	39%	32%	29%
Registration Procedures	54%	27%	19%

Demographic characteristics describing the respondents were subjected to chi-square analysis to see if they would differentiate students with regard to institutional barriers. Men noted significantly more serious problems than women in obtaining financial aid ($X^2 = 6.88$, 2df, $p < .05$).

Time 2: One institutional barrier showed significant difference between Time 1 and Time 2. Fewer people had problems obtaining campus information. (McNemar, $p < .05$).

While not a significant difference, problems with obtaining information for the graduate school and problems with registration procedures decreased between Time 1 and Time 2.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers come from the circumstances of an individual's life situation at any given time. These may include other responsibilities, such as job or family, which demand time and attention, or such things as the

distance one must travel to attend school, one's mode of transportation, etc. The latter are the more frequently included situational barriers in the literature. A second dimension of situational barriers has been included in this study: the skill-related barriers. These potential barriers refer to writing, reading, study, concentration, and exam-taking skills.

Time 1: The three most predominant situational barriers -- balancing school and family time, school and job-time, and spending time with immediate family -- were also among the most severe of all barriers (see Table 2, p. 9) and were discussed earlier. These barriers are all role-related. Included in the next three most severe situational barriers (in the 60 and 70 percent problematic range) are less role-related variables: spending time with friends, concentration and exam-taking skills (Table 5).

TABLE 5
PREDOMINANT SITUATIONAL BARRIERS

	Degree of Perceived Problem		
Situation	No Problem	Somewhat	Serious/Very Serious
Job time	24%	47%	29%
Family Time	32%	38%	30%
Immediate Family	31%	50%	19%
Time with Friends	37%	44%	19%
Concentration	26%	57%	17%
Exam-taking	35%	53%	12%

Chi-square analysis revealed no significant differences within demographic variables on the situational variables other than those mentioned in the major barriers category earlier.

People who noted spending time with friends as a very serious problem were 25-29 years of age (29 percent), women (26 percent), married (26 percent), unemployed (44 percent) full-time students (28 percent), and out-of-school 6-8 years (50 percent).

Perceptions of problems with concentration while studying were similar for women and men, married and unmarried, parents and non-parents, and among the employment statuses. On the average, 17 percent of the people within each of these variables had serious problems with concentration. More people in the 25-29 year-old age range (33 percent) and in the 3-5 years out-of-school category (21 percent) expressed serious problems with concentration than did others in those categories.

Exam-taking was a particularly serious problem for those 30-34 years of age (22 percent) and for those 6-8 years out-of-school (40 percent). Seventeen percent of full-time students found exam-taking a serious problem while none of the part-time students perceived it as a serious problem.

Time 2: Other than the significant change in balancing family-time, two other situational variables showed significant change. Both were skill-related. In Time 2 fewer people had problems with reading skills and with study skills (McNemar, $p < .05$).

Psychosocial Barriers

Psychosocial barriers include two dimensions: the psychological, which may refer to internal factors such as one's attitudes, beliefs and values, one's sense of self-esteem (in this case also student self-esteem, i.e., feeling too old to learn, inadequate in math, etc.), and the sociological, which refer to the external factors which may influence one throughout life. These could include levels of socioeconomic status, social forces such as pressures from friends or family not to attend school, and past experience in the school setting.

Total self-esteem is defined by Rosenberg (1965) as the "evaluation an individual makes of himself/herself expressed as an attitude of approval or disapproval." How one feels about oneself influences one's activities in all areas of life. There is research which indicates self-esteem is related to learning (Meichenbaum, 1980) and affects academic performance (Bigge, 1982). Total self-esteem scores for the returning adult sample were equal to or higher than those found in studies with comparable populations.

Expectation of self is noted as an aspect of self-esteem. Comparison of expected performance (grade) and actual performance showed that full-time students' expectancy was "A"; 95 percent received A's. Seventy percent of part-time students expected "B," but in fact, 85 percent earned A's. For this group the expected performance was lower than the actual performance.

Time 1: Problems with increase in stress, the major psychosocial barrier, have been discussed previously in the Top Five Barriers, Time 1 section. As can be noted in Table 6, below, the other psychosocial barriers were much less problematic than either stress or the institutional and situational barriers discussed earlier.

TABLE 6
PSYCHOSOCIAL BARRIERS

Situation	Degree of Perceived Problem		
	No Problem	Somewhat	Serious/Very Serious
Stress	10%	57%	33%
Child Acceptance	75%	25%	0%
Spouse Acceptance	67%	27%	6%
Younger Students' Acceptance	81%	14%	5%

Chi-square analysis of demographic and institutional variables yielded no significant differences, although combining "somewhat" with "serious" for spouse acceptance and applying a T-test of proportions to the number of years out-of-school variable in relation to spouse acceptance demonstrated a significant difference between 6-8 years out and either 3-5 or 9-plus years out. A greater percent of the persons who had been out-of-school for 6-8 years had problems with spouse acceptance of their return (67 percent) (half of these very serious problems) than those out 3-5 years (25 percent) or those out 9 plus years (27 percent) (T = 10.41 and 9.23 respectively). This would have been expected because more of those 6-8 years out of school have young children at home yet.

Time 2: Other than the increase in severity of stress there were no significant changes in psychosocial barriers between Time 1 and Time 2.

PERSISTENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

As noted earlier, as of March 1985, 93 percent (40) had persisted toward the degree and 7 percent (3) had withdrawn. Of those who persisted, 51 percent (22) had obtained a degree and 42 percent (18) were continuing students. Of those who withdrew, 5 percent (2) had stopped out and 2 percent (1) had dropped out.

In addition to asking about change over time regarding adult returning students' perceptions of barriers, this research intended to ask if there was a relationship between perceived barriers and persistence or withdrawal. Because of the small number who withdrew, descriptions rather than relationship-testing are all that can be offered here. However, in an effort to raise the question of relationship of barriers to persistence/withdrawal, APPENDIX C presented the findings related to the group of 47 from the original study who were not available for the second interview.

This monograph also raised the issue of the relationship of circumstances in adults' lives to barriers and to persistence/withdrawal. Some relationship was found between the number of roles adults occupied and the severity of several barriers. However, since only 3 out of 43 persons in this study withdrew, it must be acknowledged that occupying multiple roles did not seem to be a hindrance to persistence for this group of returning adult students.

TESTING OF EXPECTATIONS

Expectations from the literature regarding barriers and returning adult students, as listed on p. 4, were:

1. Situational barriers would be more problematic than psychosocial or institutional barriers.

   (Individual barriers were scored as 1, 2 or 3 to denote degree of problem severity (1 = no problem, 3 = severe problem). All situational barriers were combined into one variable by adding the means together and averaging them. This was calculated for Time 1 and Time 2. The same process was followed for combining institutional and psychosocial variables into composite categories.)

a. Situational barriers as a combined category were perceived as more serious than institutional barriers in Time 1 ($T = 2.551$, $p < .05$) and in Time 2 ($T = 3.443$, $p < .05$).

b. Situational barriers were not more of a problem than psychosocial barriers in Time 1 ($T = 1.953$) but were more of a problem in Time 2 ($T = 3.131$, $p < .05$).

2. Women would cite more family-related barriers; men would mention more job or institution-related barriers.

   a. All family-related barriers were combined and a T-test of means was used for comparing women and men on family-related barriers. No significant difference was found.

   b. One variable referred to job-related barriers. The differences between male and female on this variable were tested by using chi-square analysis. Results demonstrated no significant difference.

   c. All institution-related barriers were combined and a T-test of means showed no significant difference between men and women with regard to institution-related barriers.

3. Institutional barriers would lessen in severity over time.

   a. All institutional-related barriers were combined into one variable for Time 1 and one variable for Time 2. Paired T-test showed no significant change over time for the combined institutional barriers.

   b. It was noted earlier that one individual institutional barrier did significantly lessen in severity over time: obtaining campus information. However, one institutional factor also increased in severity: problems with teaching styles used by instructors.

4. The situational barriers would be expected to either stay the same or increase in severity over time.

   a. All situational barriers were combined into one variable for Time 1 and one variable for Time 2. Paired T-test showed no significant change over time for the combined situational barriers.

   b. As noted earlier one individual barrier increased in severity over time: balancing school and family time; most others stayed the same. However, three skill-related barriers lessened in severity: concentration while studying, reading skills and study skills.

5. Situational barriers would be related to persistence/withdrawal with those persons who withdrew perceiving the most difficulty with situational barriers.

Because only 3 of the 43 persons withdrew, statistical analysis of this relationship was not possible.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The major barriers perceived by adults who had returned to school were 1) increase in stress, 2) parking in and around campus, 3) balancing family and school time, 4) balancing job and school time, and 5) spending time with immediate family.

Balancing family and school time changed significantly between Time 1 and Time 2 with the barrier becoming a more severe problem. The other major barriers remained the same.

1. These results essentially confirmed expectations that situational barriers would be more of a problem for returning students than psychosocial or institutional barriers. However, when all situational barriers were combined together and all psychological barriers were combined together, and the two were compared for Time 1, there was no significant difference between them. Further study will be needed to clarify this finding.

A survey at UW-Eau Claire, UW-Parkside, UW-Green Bay, and UW-Superior conducted by the Wisconsin Assessment Center at Green Bay (Mishler, 1982) about the same time as the Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students study, found similar emphases on situational barriers. In a survey of older students who did not continue their college education the major reasons for leaving were job obligations, family obligations and financial problems. The circumstances under which adults would re-enroll were changes in the same variables. A check of ratings of their former school experience yielded satisfaction with the quality and variety of courses, a few suggestions for more night courses and more financial assistance. On the whole the study concluded that the personal circumstances of the adults' lives may be paramount while the institutional barriers may not significantly influence retention.

In the UW-Madison study the absence of financial issues as serious barriers reflected circumstances particular to the group studied. In interviews students noted that they had planned for the financial demands of returning to school by borrowing from family or other lending sources or by using savings to pay tuition. Some, after returning to school and hearing about other financial aid possibilities, tried to obtain some financial help through campus sources. From the literature it would seem that this minimizing of financial barriers may be unique to this group.

2. While increase in stress had been conceived of as a psychosocial barriers, students in this study cited the difficulty of balancing spouse, family and worker roles in explaining the high degrees of stress. It must be noted that we do not know the extent to which the stress measured is the consequence of these specific barriers.

At issue, when one looks at the interaction of barriers referred to by these returning students in the interview data, is the presence of multiple roles. The number of adult roles held by subjects in this group of students ranged from 1-1/2 to 4, with a mean of 2.76. In the calculations each role was assigned a 1 except for "part-time worker" or "part-time student," which

were each given a score of .50. The breakdown for number of adult roles participated in can be seen in Table 7.

TABLE 7
NUMBER OF ADULT ROLES

Number of Roles	Number of Persons	%
1.50	1	2
2.00	6	14
2.50	17	40
3.00	9	21
3.50	9	21
4.00	1	2

At present, two role theories address the issue of multiple roles. One, called the scarcity theory (Goode, 1960), posits that the more roles one has, the less energy and less ability to continue one may have in these roles. Therefore, there is a need to reduce roles or role demands. The second theory, an accumulation theory (Sieber, 1974; Marks, 1977), posits a contrary view: the more roles, the more energy. Specific information to test these theories was not included in the "Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students" study. However a one-way analysis of variance and the Scheffe and Tukey multiple range tests were used to check for a possible relationship between number of roles occupied and the top barriers experienced. Significant differences were found with regard to two variables.

The mean for difficulty balancing job and school time and the mean for difficulty with spending time with immediate family were significantly higher for those students who occupied 3.5 to 4. roles compared with those who occupied 2.5 to 2. roles. Additionally, for all categories of roles the means for both variables increased as the number of roles increased.

Severity of stress was high regardless of the number of roles students occupied. In the interviews, students stated that they were experiencing growing stress and resultant health problems due to the competing demands of their adult roles. Clearly, further research on this multiple-role issue is needed.

These time-balancing issues challenge school administrators and instructors. The idea of a linear life plan, of moving from education to work, to retirement, has been challenged by persons returning to school at different times during their lives and by persons changing careers. But the question must be asked, "have the educational institutions considered the implications of these changes?" Further, in the process of this societal change, two sorts of life plans seem to have emerged. Cross (1982, p. 14) notes a blended life pattern, where one major role is simply added to

another. Thus, as is the case with some of the people in this study, education is added to the already full work schedule. The second life plan, the cyclic life plan, involves moving out of one role temporarily, entirely or in part, in order to take on another. In this study some students went from full- to part-time work and others took leaves of absence.

Whether the situational pattern is blended or cyclic, a number of issues must be considered. Predominant among them is that adults are engaged in a number of primary commitments simultaneously and each is important. School becomes one of these commitments. At times one aspect of the commitment may be emphasized, another minimally attended to. These new patterns call for changes in previously held assumptions. Older students are not just students; nor are they primarily students. Yet, the implicit assumption of higher education is that one's attention is focused solely on school. Not only are class offerings, times, etc. designed for the full-time student who is primarily a student, but so too are the hours of the deans, financial advisors, counseling, health and returning student offices.

Further, most campuses do not offer low-cost married student housing for undergraduates; few offer sufficient married student housing for graduates, and a number of schools do not offer university-sponsored day care for children.

On another level, it is clear both from policy and from attitudes that there is a tacit assumption by administrators, recruiters, counselors, and instructors that relationships and family do not significantly impact on the returning older student. This and the assumption of single-role commitment unaffected by other adult roles must be challenged.

3. Another issue in these findings is gender-related. The problem of balancing family and school time is perceived as more serious for women. Yet, when all family-related barriers are combined there is not a significant difference between women and men. Balancing job and school time is a more serious barrier for men.

As serious and persistent barriers for women and for men, the relationship between these issues and persistence/withdrawal, as well as the relationships between time spent in various roles and perceptions of difficulty needs to be tested.

Further, it is often an assumption in adult education that persons (particularly women) do not return to school until their home responsibilities are minimalized, at least as far as caring for children is concerned. The results of this study have indicated that such an assumption needs to be further tested.

In this study women with small children returned to school and perceived balancing family and school time as a barrier. Additionally, women who no longer had small children returned to school and also perceived balancing family and school time as a barrier.

These serious gender-related barriers point to the need for university counseling and returning-student services to help students understand and to better deal with these barriers. They call too for further research on gender-related role issues and for study directed toward the effects of changing gender roles on returning adult students.

4. A fourth aspect of the major barrier findings was the surprise at finding such intense levels of stress and, while not significant, a further increase from Time 1 to Time 2.

Previous research from the student services field has indicated that a substantial number of adults experience psychological strain when they return to school (Tittle and Denker, 1977, 1979; Wallace, 1979). Further research from the psychological person-environment fit perspective theorizes that the actual returning to school has an impact on all aspects of a person's life but the student gradually adjusts to student life and stress is mitigated (Campbell, Wilson, Hanson 1980).

However, in this study almost all of the students (90 percent) perceived stress as a problem, 33 percent, perceived it as a serious or very serious problem. Additionally, stress was not mitigated over the course of the year. By Time 2, 95 percent of the students perceived stress as a problem.

The stress issues resulting from the perception of and balancing of multiple roles cannot be neglected. Actually the psychosocial and situational issues here cannot really be separated. Just as students note situational and support difficulties in relationships, so too they talk about the guilt of not being able to give enough time to the family, the guilt of using family resources to pursue their own interests and the fear of not getting a job after they, their spouses and their children have gone through so much.

Too, this study leaves no doubt that stresses of school affect health. While not a psychosocial barrier in the strict definition of the term, health affects one's mental as well as physical state, and vice versa. There is a strong relationship between health and the psychosocial and situational dimensions of one's life just as there is between stress and learning and health and stress in other major areas of one's life. These cannot be separated.

Yet in higher education there is an assumption that various aspects of a student's life are highly segmented. Administration, instruction, counseling, health services and exercise facilities are located in different parts of the campus, symbolic of the 'separate issues' which they address. Each service plans, promotes and carries out its own program, most often independently of the others. As a result, dissemination of information and contact with students is often inadequate. There is also competition between services, a tendency to view persons' lives as segmented, a failure to touch the local department level where the students spend their time on campus, and the assumption that learning can occur regardless of students' physical, mental or situational states.

5. In this study students were selected from two schools, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) and the School of Education. It was reasoned that the inclusion of these two schools would provide a broad base for the study. Each school offers diverse areas of specialization. CALS students would be primarily full-time students with primarily day classes while ED students would be full- and part-time with a choice of day, evening classes, and in some cases, weekend classes.

As far as actual enrollment was concerned for this study, there were 17 students enrolled in CALS, nine men and eight women, and 26 enrolled in Education, 16 women and 10 men.

Differences between schools were tested with regard to the various barriers and the results demonstrated the possibility of expected gender related differences rather than discipline differences. There were significant differences with regard to two barriers: Persons in CALS had significantly more serious problems obtaining financial aid ($X^2 = 6.88$, 2df, $P < .05$) while persons in Education had more serious problems with parking ($X^2 = 8.86$, 2df, $P < .05$).

Further analysis revealed that difficulty obtaining financial aid in CALS was a severe problem for the male students. These persons were for the most part full-time students, married, parents and heads of household. Over half were employed part-time. Most of the women in the study were not heads of their households. The men in Education were either not heads of households or not full-time students.

The parking issue may be related to the fact that classes in Education were more likely to be held in late afternoon or evening than classes in CALS. Too, more women than men in Education had problems with parking, raising the issue of whether, in addition to access, there was a safety issue involved. Further research on this point would be necessary to determine the extent to which this issue is particular to the Madison campus, and to what extent it is a gender issue if time and safety issues are considered.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FOR THE FUTURE

As larger numbers of older students return to college and university campuses, the importance of knowing and understanding these persons cannot be minimized. These are autonomous persons, responsible for their own choices regarding where, how and what they learn. They are volunteers in the educational system. They provide their own financial support. These are persons who are not only students, nor even primarily students. Issues of returning students, as this study has demonstrated, cannot be segmented. As the interview data demonstrated, a sick child influences the parent's concentration in class, which in turn influences the amount of time needed to get missed information, which influences amount of stress, which influences health, etc.

The purpose of the "Characteristics and Problems of Older Returning Students" study was to provide information about the older returning student population. As a result of the findings of this study, considerations for practice and the future will be addressed under three areas: suggestions for practice, suggestions for research, and philosophical considerations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

Some suggestions for practice have been mentioned in the report of the findings. A summation of major recommendations is included here.

1. There is a need for all persons in university services to be informed about the particular returning older student population.

2. The characteristics of returning adult students detailed in this study challenge college and universities to respond in ways that sometimes must be different from how they respond to the more traditional students. For instance, the time-line of reading and writing assignments, the dates for

test taking, and even a regular attendance at classes may not be met by returning adult students in the manner instructors of traditional students may expect.

3. In-service workshops for university personnel are needed to translate the information about this larger population into practice. For example, in-service for instructors could include information about stress and the returning student: how to recognize it, what to do about it, and where to refer the student for appropriate counseling services. Another in-service offering may deal with teaching styles, varying methods of how to teach, how to change or incorporate several teaching styles, how to deal with assignment and test expectations when the population is older returning students.

4. Cooperation between various departments of university services may better help to support the person who is student, worker, spouse, etc.

5. Specific problem issues need to be considered by appropriate departments:

a. Flexible registration and class times, availability of assignment committees and of professors for returning students whose time schedules are influenced by work responsibilities.

b. Parking and safety issues including a) consideration of adequate parking for commuting students, particularly those who are part-time and may need parking for only an hour or two during the week; b) consideration of the safety issue for women in relation to parking: adequate lighting, and parking within easy walking distance of night classrooms.

c. Availability of support groups. Mutual support groups can provide invaluable service to the returning student who believes his or her problem is unique. Such groups can also provide social opportunities for returning students who may not have time or the inclination for social activities designed for more traditional age students.

d. Counseling services to help returning students understand their multiple roles, and to help with issues ranging from helping a child understand the parent's return to school, to marital counseling.

e. Multiple opportunities for skill-building including such things as workshops on study skills, reading, mathematics, writing and concentration.

f. Career-counseling opportunities, especially for women who have returned to school and are seeking a career after many years out of the job market.

g. Stress workshops for students and their families.

6. At the institutional level, colleges and universities often need to examine several fundamental questions:

a. To what extent has the college or university actively recruited adult students without making adequate adjustments to accommodate them - flexible registration procedures, variety of class time (including evenings and weekends), offering student services on evenings and weekends, and opportunities for learning at a distance (using correspondence study, radio, micro-computers, etc.).

b. To what extent has the college or university made a concerted effort to solve the unique problems faced by returning students --parking, safety questions, counseling services, etc.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Some suggestions for research were given in the discussion of results. The following also deserve consideration:

1. This was a Caucasian, basically middle- to upper-middle-class sample, comprised of persons returning to graduate school on a Big Ten campus to obtain an advanced degree. The findings of this study may be particular to this population. Further research is needed to determine the similarities and differences of diverse older returning student populations. This research would include smaller campuses, large urban campuses and campuses in predominantly rural areas. Other racial and socio-economic groups need to be studied. Persons seeking an undergraduate degree or certificate, or who are returning for job-updating purposes rather than for a degree or certificate, must be studied.

2. In order to contribute to the building of theory in adult education, further research looking at the relationship of adult roles to perceived barriers and to persistence/withdrawal for returning adult students is recommended. Within this research, study of gender-related role issues is also recommended. Gender is one of the most predominant of roles, and is most related to adult roles of spouse, parent and worker by persistent socialization throughout life.

3. Research about the meanings of problems that surfaced must be conducted. For example, this report discusses the issue of serious stress as a result of competing forces within and surrounding the returning older student. When does this stress become harmful to the individual? Can a reduction of stress be measured? Does a reduction of stress have a relationship to learning? To success in acquiring a degree? Do stress reduction exercises at the beginning of class affect learning?

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to practice and research findings, this monograph has suggested that perhaps the older returning student issue calls not just for assimilating new information and changing some procedures or services, but also for philosophical considerations of the basic assumptions of the university (or for that matter, of any educational provider to older adults).

Essentially, these philosophical issues concern matching the purpose of the returning adult student to the purposes of the educator. Two main

areas of consideration would provide bases for decision-making and for the use of information.

The first concerns the mission of the educational institution.

1. What is the mission of the institution?

2. How, at present, is that mission expressed?

3. Do the major policy decisions (eg. admission requirements, teaching expectations, residency criteria) reflect the mission of the institution? How?

4. What are the assumptions behind each policy decision? (e.g., registration procedures, admission requirements, class scheduling, teaching requirements, class teaching environments, conference or workshop planning).

   a. Who benefits from these policies? (the institution? the student? the profession?)

   b. How does the institution benefit?

   c. How does the student benefit?

   d. Which students benefit? (traditional? returning? other)

   e. Is the institution aware of what the student populations are like? (Their needs, their limitations, - from their point of view?). Are these notions updated as populations change?

   f. Do the policy assumptions reflect the varied student population?

5. If the policy assumptions do not reflect the varied or changing student population, the question of mission is reconsidered. What is the heart of the institution's mission? How can new policies, new means, continue the mission?

The second area of philosophical consideration concerns the use of research for policy making by educational institutions. The question is: "What does the educational institution do with such surveys?" Does one plan because 60 or 70 or 80 percent say something? What about the other 20 or 30 or 40 percent? Are they ignored because they are not the majority? For example, 61 percent of responding students did not have problems finding a place to study. However, 39 percent did and this was a problem at both interview times.

Several suggestions are offered for a process of consideration:

1. Look at the mission of the institution. To what extent does it intend to facilitate learning for the student, and to what extent does it intend that the student will facilitate his or her own learning?

For example, is providing a place to park an expression of the mission? How? To what extent? Has this been done before? What were the reasons behind providing space for parking? Why isn't there adequate parking? Could this lack reflect an assumption of a large boarding campus for traditional students that providing ample and convenient on-campus parking was not necessary? Are there philosophical reasons why this could not be considered now?

2. Look at the numbers and percentages for each issue. Who do these numbers represent? Is there a particular subset of the population represented? What is known with regard to the people represented? Are there explanations for the problem issue which could influence the considerations?

   For example, many of those who have problems with finding a place to park are women concerned about safety. This is not an uncommon finding.

3. Situate the issue in the context of institutional life as a whole. How does this issue of providing a place to park affect the institution regarding offerings to students, promoting of scholarship, recruitment, space allocation, budgeting, etc.?

4. Situate the issue in the context of the student's life. How does this issue of finding a place to park affect the individual's participation, learning, stress, persistence, job, school and family time?

In conclusion, this monograph has closed as it began, in the process of asking questions, questions which may provide responses for the present, from which new questions may come tomorrow.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

The descriptor "traditional" has been applied to undergraduate students who have gone from high school directly to college, and therefore are usually between 18 and 22 years of age. It is often assumed that traditional students do not work and are not usually married or parents. These assumptions must be challenged in future research. Some "traditional" students do work. Further, some students, particularly those who enter community colleges or vocational-technical schools directly after high school, marry or have children while they are in school.

Too, there is a widespread belief that normal progression through college for "traditional" students is eight consecutive semesters. However, research demonstrates that for the majority of students, the term of progression is longer (Pantages and Creedon, 1978). For every 10 students who enter college in the United States, only four will graduate from that college four years later, but at some point many dropouts will return. Statistics do show that eventually 7 out of 10 students who entered college will obtain a college degree. In summary, many of the assumptions about the "traditional" student have yet to be challenged, and research such as Pantages and Creedon (1978) has yet to be widely publicized. The authors of the present research recognize the needs for study of the "traditional" student. However, the purpose of this study was to look at students who did not continue their higher education studies in a linear fashion. Hence, the subjects of this research, classified as "returning adult students" by the National Center for Educational Statistics, had been away from school for at least three years and were 25 years of age or older. This study was meant to describe only returning adult students. No comparison with "traditional" students was intended.

APPENDIX B

At the time of the second data collection, of the people who were not available for the second interview (N = 47), six had completed their degree, nine had stopped out (four later returned to school), nine had dropped out and 23 were unable to be reached or chose not to participate a second time.

By March, 1985 when final data was collected on the status of all participants, the following was found for the 47 participants interviewed once: 23 percent (11) had obtained a degree, 41 percent (19) were continuing students, 15 percent (7) had stopped out, and 21 percent (10) had dropped out.

In this research the question asked was whether there was a difference between the 43 person available for two interviews and the 47 persons available for one interview. Tables were established to compare the responses from the first semester of the N = 43 persons with the N = 47 persons on three categories: demographic data, barrier data and final status data. Chi-square analysis was employed. Analysis of demographic data showed significance for three variables: More students from the School of Education were interviewed once than were interviewed twice ($X^2 = 7.11$, 1df, $p < .05$); more women were interviewed once than were interviewed twice ($X^2 = 4.40$, 1df, $p < .05$), and more divorced, separated and widowed persons were interviewed once than were interviewed twice ($X^2 = 7.61$, 2df, $p < .05$).

Analysis of barrier data showed significant difference on only one variable: access to libraries. Those who were interviewed once had more serious problems with library access than those who were interviewed twice ($X^2 = 9.8$, 2df, $p < .05$).

Analysis of final persistence/withdrawal data demonstrated significant difference. Ten persons (21 percent) of those who were interviewed once dropped out while only one person (2 percent) of those who were interviewed twice dropped out.

Additionally, 11 persons (23 percent) of those interviewed once obtained their degree while 22 (51 percent) of those were interviewed twice received their degree ($X^2 = 13.68$, 3df, $p < .05$). (Nine of the 10 persons who were interviewed once and who dropped out did so in the first year of their return to school. This may indicate that dropping out takes place early in one's return to school.)

Because of the significant differences, particularly in the persistence withdrawal categories, between the two groups, N = 43 and N = 47, it is not possible to suggest that any changes which took place between semester 1 and semester 2 for the N = 43 would have been similar for the N = 47.

APPENDIX C

Originally it had been the intention of the research on returning adult students to ask if a relationship existed between the perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal. However, because only three out of 43 withdrew from school, such a relationship could not be tested.

The same question was then asked of the 47 persons who were interviewed once, but who were not available for the second interview.

Tables 8 and 9 which follow on give the status and demographic details for these 47 persons.

Chi-square analysis demonstrated no significant relationships between the perceived barriers and persistence/withdrawal. It may be that this sample of 47 persons where 17 persons withdrew was too small a group to work with. It may also be that while returning students experience barriers upon returning to school, these barriers are not related to persistence or withdrawal. Future research of this issue with a larger population is suggested.

TABLE 8
(N=47) DEGREE STATUS

Status	Number	%
Obtained a degree	11	23
Continuing Students	19	41
Stopped Out	7	15
Dropped Out	10	21

TABLE 9
(N=47) DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

BY PERSISTENCE/WITHDRAWAL

	Persistence		Withdrawal	
Description	Number	%	Number	%
School				
CALS	4	67	2	33
ED	26	63	15	37
Gender				
Male	6	60	4	40
Female	24	65	13	35
Marital Status				
Never Married	7	78	2	22
Married	19	68	9	32
DSW	4	40	6	60
Parental Status				
Children	11	52	10	48
No Children	19	73	7	27
Employment Status				
Full-Time	7	47	8	53
Part-Time	12	63	7	37
Unemployed	11	85	2	15
Student Status				
Full-Time	18	75	6	25
Part-Time	12	52	11	48

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